

Huntress

by I'mNotGivingMyNameToAMachine

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Summary: A courageous, eccentric and highly intelligent female UNSC Marine enters combat for the first time, demonstrates immense heroism, accidentally saves a Hunter's life and is then captured by the behemoth, who takes her to its clan. She is then presumed dead and a candidate for the Medal of Honor in a case investigated by an increasingly flustered and exhausted ONI First Lieutenant.

1. The Firebrand

What was she doing here?

Oh, yes. That question. The question asked by most of her peers and superiors and (numerous times) by herself in the past year and a half. What could have possessed her to possibly seek out this position? Was she out of her mind? Lost touch with reality, perhaps? Her parents had certainly said so upon hearing of her choice. But even though they hated her decision greatly, they had supported her as much as they could possibly be expected to. They secretly believed she'd wash out anyway; never reach combat. Nothing to worry about. She'd be back home pursuing a good, longstanding career not long after she left in the first place. They were wrong on both counts.

Become a scientist, they had plead. Use your abilities to help on the home front, they had begged.

Her grades in college (the nearly two years she was there) were impeccable. Perfect, one might be so bold to say. She had only a few years left of higher education (three or four at the most) and she'd have been well on her way to a prestigious career curing cancer, or solving the next disaster that needed to be solved, or something of the sort. Hell, maybe she could've gotten into the weapons division and helped build the weapons of the future. Help out in that manner. God knows, humanity could certainly use the help.

But no; she chose to walk away from all that. And not just walk away, stoop to a life full of high school dropouts and recovering ex-cons searching for redemption. Why? What could have motivated her to do this? It made no sense to the common person that she'd come across. Her superiors all knew who she was; where she had come from; what kind of life she had walked out of. It confounded all of them. What could have motivated this skinny girl to join up in the UNSC when she could have literally held the world in the palm of her hand in a few years time?

No rational person could find a reason.

"She's an enigma," her comrade in arms and very good friend Private First Class Sean Wrentz had informed the on-base psychologist after the routine examination of the recruits. Mandatory for anyone and everyone sent into combat; or even allowed to join the UNSC, for that matter. She had passed, of course. And no one was any closer to learning her motives.

"What the fuck are you doing here fuckin' up my Corps, matchhead?!" her first drill sergeant, Sergeant Burwell, had demanded in his customarily very loud drill sergeant voice during her very first line-up.

"Sir, learning to fuck up the enemy, sir!" she had yelled in reply.

Why hadn't she at the very least trained to become an officer? That would have made sense considering her grades. But no, she was predictably unpredictable and had chosen to enlist and become a foot soldier; a grunt.

Why?

Basic training was difficult, to say the least. And, of course, being the only female in her drill platoon certainly didn't help matters. But she had proven herself more than capable of the task. The track and field she had done in high school had helped her more than she could've imagined at the time she was doing it. She was a runner; always had been. She could run fast and do so for a long time. In fact, she was damn near the fastest person in her platoon of thirty-six.

Her platoon's Staff Sergeant, Sergeant Andrew Levine, her direct enlisted supervisor, had been very impressed.

"Speed'll save your ass one of the days, Kendall. Especially since your size sure as hell won't," he had said, not being able to hide some of his pride at her speed, but cursing her stature as well. She was far and away the smallest person in her platoon.

She was an above average shot. Nothing too spectacular, but her quick footedness and very minuscule height made her ideal for a scout, and she had gotten assigned to a Battle Rifle: the scoped medium-ranged weapon handed out to marines who didn't get the more common Assault Rifle. She was supposed to act as spotter with the best shot of her platoon, Lance Corporal Rudin, one of the platoon's select few snipers. She liked the task; starting to work quite well with Rudin.

After the year and some change basic course, she had graduated as a Marine in the UNSC. No one thought she could do it. Nobody. But she did. And had done rather well, at that.

The new Marines had been granted a little bit of leave to visit families and the like before they were shipped off-world to face the Covenant. Everyone knew that many, perhaps most, would not return.

Her mother had been in tears most of her visit. Her father walked around looking like she had already died. It wasn't a very good reunion. She had left Earth on the UNSC troop-carrier/frigate Edibus for another of Earth's stronghold planets: Reach. One of the few large military base planets that humanity had left. Her unit had stayed on Reach only a few days before being rerouted to another of Earth's military Planets: Hold. A stronghold even farther out than Reach.

Her unit would then be dispatched from there accordingly to where they were needed most.

They had arrived at Hold and had promptly continued their training, though it was merely a formality at this point; just to keep them sharp. Over a year of non-stop training had already made them as close to perfect as they were ever likely to get.

For nearly three months the training continued, until word from a human colony world was received; a distress signal. The world was under attack, and the defenses were not likely to hold much longer. The brass who commanded Hold decided to send a task force to evacuate the planet; it wasn't a mission of attack, it was a mission of retreat. And her unit was one the ones chosen to embark on that mission.

They were going to see combat. Finally. Nearly two years of waiting and it was finally here. They were dispatched immediately, taking the ship they had used to get from Earth to Reach, and then to Hold in the first place: the Edibus.

The days it had taken to arrive at the besieged planet (she would find out it was named Ametrine) had been uneventful. If anything, they were too nerve wracking to allow anyone to do much of anything without being completely distracted by the thought of it.

At last the day came and she, along with her platoon, were roused from their cramped bunks and struggled to quickly put their armor and tactical gear on. They grabbed their weapons and ammunition, and made their way to a Pelican drop ship, shouting cries of war and readiness as they went, before being piled into small ships, which held twelve soldiers with full gear.

"Are we mean motherfuckers?!" Staff Sergeant Levine yelled, as the drop ship's ramp closed, cutting off the rest of the the universe.

"We're mean motherfuckers, sir!" eleven marines, including her, yelled in reply.

"Goddamn right! And we're gonna prove to the fuckin' Covenant just how fucking mean we are!"

"Sir yes sir!"

Rudin was here, being her sniper companion, as was Wrentz, one of her best friends from basic. They were all here and they were all finally going into combat. They were told that the battle for the planet was well underway, but that the Covenant fleet seemed small thus far. This worked to their advantage. Maybe the Covenant was stretched too thin to allow it too many ships to attack this world.

Maybe... But it didn't really matter. All that did matter, was that the current human force wasn't enough to evacuate all the people living on Ametrine. It was the Marines' job to make time; to stall until more human military forces could arrive and until every single human was out of there safely.

Ametrine was a beautiful world, she would later note. It was full of trees and other growth, and was about one quarter covered by ocean. Perfect for life. Maybe that's why the Covenant wanted the world intact; they didn't simply glass it.

The Covenant had landed troops; thousands and thousands of troops, to wipe out the human resistance, and to take the planet as their own.

That's what the brass had figured their plan was, anyway. So, they had said it was the preferable thing. It gave time to get as many people out of there as they could. But they all doubted that the planet would be under anything but Covenant control shortly.

But the mission wasn't to keep the planet from the Covenant; it was to get the hell out. They were basically running into battle already knowing they'd retreat. That may have made the idea of going into combat easier to take, she mused, as her comrades shouted words of readiness around her. But in the long run, it was another planet lost to humanity.

They were running out of planets to lose.

The Pelican shuddered into flight, and she knew they were well on their way. They would be dropped right into combat, or as close to as the pilot dared. She checked her Battle Rifle, making sure it was locked and loaded.

It was.

She checked the three fragmentation grenades that she kept on her belt, and the extra five magazines for her main weapon. She made sure her spotting scope was secure. She'd really need that later. It was quite secure; not going anywhere. She was ready. Everything was ready.

But...

What was she doing here?

2. Wehnam

First Lieutenant Edward Wehnam wasn't having what most would even

call a tolerable day. Not in the least.

He was one of many among the small convoy of three UNSC ships en route to the military planet Hold from the now Covenant captured, humanity lost planet Ametrine, where the successful albeit somewhat costly rescue mission had taken place.

An estimated seventy-five percent of the civilian populace (sixty thousand people give or take) had been evacuated safely and successfully, but the cost of Marines it had required was in the thousands.

What was left, was piled into the three UNSC ships that had responded to the attack: the frigates Edibus and Hemingway (the ship Wehnam was on) and the enormous cargo ship, the name of which he didn't even know. All he knew is that the huge cargo carrier had been quickly refit to carry the many, many refugees evacuated from Ametrine. The cargo ship was simply massive, over three kilometers long (over six times the length of its frigate escorts) though Wehnam could only imagine how crammed sixty thousand refugees must have been in the ship.

Again, thousands and thousands of Marines had died in the combat and it Wehnam's job to document as many confirmed KIA'd Marines and other military personnel as possible, using the reports sent in from various heads of command; the officers in charge of the foot soldiers on the ground, that was. He was recording all of this on a computer terminal located in the small quarters he was given. He was thankful for the privacy that the room provided, but the blessing had come with the task (which he considered a curse). The only reason he was allowed to stay in this little room, was because he was recording the dead.

Wonderful...

Edward Wehnam was of medium height and medium build (maybe a little on the thin side). He was sandy-haired man, who could've been considered hopelessly average by Navel Intelligence standards. Or by any other standards. Just pick one; he was probably average by whatever standard one had in mind. He had done fairly well in the intelligence training school, not horribly, not spectacularly, and had, of course, successfully graduated with his officer's commission. He hadn't yet been assigned anything important. In fact, this was his first big mission off of Earth. And what did he get stuck with? Listing who had died in battle.

It was boring and depressing to boot.

Wehnam sighed, and took another sip of his coffee; black, no sugar, no cream. Just how he liked it. Boring. And much like his current task and his coffee, Wehnam could be considered hopelessly boring, living an utterly uneventful life. He had left no girlfriend or wife back on Earth and scarce few family. He was twenty-six years old, supposedly in the prime of his life, yet he felt like some aged librarian or trapped in some other agonizingly dreary profession.

Why had he chosen this career again?

Oh right, the excitement. Wehnam was a proud member of the ONI

(Office of Navel Intelligence) and this was the job he got.

He was just about to move on to a different regiment of KIAs, when there was a knock on the door to the small room.

"Come in," Wehnam muttered, not looking up from his computer. Who could this possibly be? Quite frankly, the young officer couldn't care less who it was. All he knew is that it was an interruption, and it bothered him. The sooner he got this job done, the better.

He was, however, immensely thankful that he wasn't the only person doing this job; there were several other low-ranking intelligence officers like him working on different regiments and units. There were three others, Wehnam recalled, though he had never met or heard of any of them before this assignment. The four were supposed to meet up after all the KIAs had been listed, and together they were supposed to formulate a report that would be given to the CO of the mission.

The door slide open with a groan/hiss, and Wehnam slowly turned his head to see who was interrupting him.

It was Colonel Craig Fisk himself, the very man who had assigned Wehnam his task.

Wehnam was just about to jump out of his chair and go to the position of attention, which was the regulation for when a much higher ranking person entered a room, when Fisk cut him off.

"Oh, don't even bother," the Colonel muttered, taking a seat on the small bunk that Wehnam would sleep on later that night.

In fact, everything in this room was small. The only things in the room itself was the small bunk, the chair where Wehnam now sat, the computer terminal, and just enough space left for Wehnam to put his combat gear, which included his Magnum pistol; standard issue sidearm of officers. It was in its holster which also contained two extra magazines.

Wehnam didn't get up, but tensed up anyway. It was a habit.

Fisk had a right to look worn and torn. He was on Ametrine heading the rescue operation. He had been in total command of the ground operation. In fact, Wehnam noted, next to Rear Admiral Halladay, Fisk was the highest ranking person in the small fleet.

Fisk lowered his hand to his side and sighed. "Making any progress?"

The Colonel certainly looked weary and it was more then just exhaustion. It was defeat. The man looked much older then his fifty-three years.

"Enough, sir. I should be done before morning."

Wehnam groaned inwardly. Morning was a good eleven hours away. He'd work through the night, though; he wanted to be done with this goddamn job.

"That's good, Wehnam. You're the fastest of the four of you doing

this thing," the Colonel responded, "And you're done as of right now. You're being reassigned."

"Reassigned?" Wehnam blinked. "Permission to speak freely, sir?"

Fisk nodded once. "Granted."

"Reassigned to where?" Wehnam asked, wondering what could possibly be worse than what he was already doing.

"I'm getting reports from Lieutenant Waits of uncommon heroism on the field."

Wehnam listened carefully. Lieutenant Waits was one of the several intelligence officers putting together a timeline of events from the rescue on Amatrine; what had happened, when it had happened and who it had happened to.

ONI was quite busy at the moment, it seemed.

"Well, apparently every surviving member of second platoon, 782nd company is saying that a certain Marine should be awarded the Medal of Honor," Fisk continued.

"Really?" Wehnam replied, shocked to the point where that, coupled with how tired he was, caused him to forget to be formal. "Where is this Marine?"

He was completely unsure how any of this pertained to him, or why Colonel Fisk himself was visiting him to inform him of it. Being personally visited by such a high ranking officer would've normally freaked Wehnam out more, had he not been so numb from the hours of recording work.

"She died in combat," Fisk replied, looking even more tired than Wehnam felt.

It was a woman, Wehnam realized. He was just about to ask for permission to speak once again, when Fisk saved him the trouble.

"I'm assigning you," Fisk began, "to interview the survivors of second platoon. If the stories that I'm hearing all match up with each other, Private Kendall will get the medal."

Fisk sighed once again. "I want her to get that medal, Wehnam. I sincerely do. But I want the investigation done right. You make sure all the angles of this story are covered and recorded and I want a detailed report on my desk as soon as you humanly can... And don't worry, your portion of your current task has been divided among your three peers."

"Yes sir," Wehnam was just about to ask where to begin this task, when Fisk, who seemed always a step ahead of his questions said, "I sent everything we've got on this Marine and the survivors of second platoon to your computer. You should have it now."

"Thank you, sir," Wehnam said automatically. He couldn't think of anything else to say at the moment.

Fisk nodded. "If all of this goes well, you could be looking at some recognition yourself. This is an important task." He smiled wearily. "This war needs heroes, Lieutenant. And this Private Kendall as far as I can tell, sure seems like one."

Fisk got up to leave and had the door opened, Wehnam suddenly had a thought and couldn't resist asking one of the few questions he actually had to ask the Colonel in order to get an answer.

"Permission to speak, sir?"

The older man paused, and nodded once again. "Go for it, Lieutenant."

Wehnam took a breath. "Why me, sir?"

Fisk cracked a small smile. "I've done my research on the other ONI officers in this fleet, and you just seem the most competent."

The Colonel paused, then added, "And people that my gut tells me are competent tend to be just that."

Fisk turned to leave. "I want that report soon. Before we get back to Hold, if you can... I suggest you get to work. Feel free to contact me if you hit any roadblocks."

And with that, the Colonel was gone, the door closing behind him with the same groan and hiss it had made when he had arrived.

Wehnam breathed out. What the hell just happened?

He turned back to face to computer screen, and closed the lists he had compiled of the KIA'd personael, saving them, just in case, and then checked his personal mail box. It was something mandatory for all officers to have theirs own e-mail type mailbox.

And wouldn't you know it? He had a single message in his in box. Addressed from Colonel Fisk himself. Fisk hadn't had anyone else compile this list; he had done it himself. He must really want this Private Kendall to get the medal, Wehnam thought, as he opened the message and downloaded to the computer all of the attachments.

All the available information on five Marines was listed. The four survivors and the Marine in question herself.

Only four survivors? Wehnam thought, out of a platoon of thirty-six? This platoon was one of the harder ones hit. At least one of the worst off platoons that he had seen.

It listed:

Staff Sergeant Andrew Levine

Lance Corporal Samuel Howard

Private First Class Sean Wrentz

Private First Class Matteo Franco

These were the four names under the list of second platoon survivors.

Wehnam read it over. Wrentz was unharmed. Howard was in critical but stable condition in the medical wing from severe plasma burns over fifteen percent of his body. Franco had been hit with shrapnel from a fragmentation grenade that was thrown too close to him. The report said he was going to be fine. Levine was also in critical condition, having taken several needler rounds to the torso. But despite that, the report stated that the sergeant had still been able to drag Howard from combat.

These were the people that Wehnam had to interview.

Well, he mused, at least this was closer to combat than he'd ever been and at this rate, probably the closest he'd ever get.

All of them were listed as being currently on the Hemingway, so that made Wehnam's job a lot easier as well; he was immensely thankful.

The last digital folder he opened was labeled PFC T. Kendall.

So this was her.

Wehnam opened the page, and text lined down the page next to a full picture of the Private standing proud in her dress uniform. It was dated right before she and her platoon had been sent to Amatrine from Hold.

She was beautiful, to say the least. She was also small. Wehnam needed nothing in the picture to give scale to realize that. She was also pretty thin. Wehnam would've almost been surprised if she weighed more than a hundred pounds. How had a girl like this made it through training in the first place?

She had somewhat bright but non-abrasive red-gold hair. Wehnam could tell that it had been cropped completely off as was mandatory for Marines at the start of basic training, but it didn't look like it had been messed with since. There was easily a year and a half of growth. Wehnam could tell from the picture that she had probably had long hair before basic training and it seemed she wanted it to grow back to become somewhat what she was used to. Her hair was certainly her most striking feature and it contrasted greatly, though not badly, with her somewhat pale skin. She had bright blue eyes that shined with confidence like she knew exactly where she was and where she was going. Wehnam wondered if this picture was taken before or after she had been told that she would be going into combat. Her eyes accompanied her wide grin that showed off white, perfect teeth.

What the fuck was this girl doing in the Marines? How did she get there at all? She should've been a model, or something. Or at the very least... not in the Marines. Wehnam had to tear his eyes away from her picture to read the text that accompanied it. The first thing he read was the caption under the photo itself.

Private First Class Tessa F. Kendall. KIA; Planet Ametrine; March 11, 2552.

So this was the hero, Wehnam thought, taking another sip of his coffee and noting with mild irritation that it was getting rather cold. He again pulled up the folder containing the files on the four survivors of second platoon. They were all located on this ship, which was convenient and lucky, especially since they had arrived at Amatrine on the Edibus.

Wehnam sighed. At least he was going to leave this room.

And then a thought hit him like a brick. This assignment was incredibly prestigious, he thought, becoming nervous for a second. What was the Colonel thinking assigning him, a boring average, junior officer the task of finding out if a fallen marine should get Medal of Honor? The Colonel must be out of his mind.

Well fuck it, Wehnam decided. Might as well just do the fucking thing and be done with it. Fuck how 'prestigious' it was. He was just a lowly officer doing a job. That simple.

Wehnam decided to start right this instant, despite being exhausted and he picked the second platoon survivor closest to him: Lance Corporal Howard, who was in one of the sickbays on the Hemingway, the one closest to Wehnam (Levine and Franco were in the other one, and it was farther away) and he decided that the wounded marine was as good a place to start as any.

At least this job might not be boring.

End
file.